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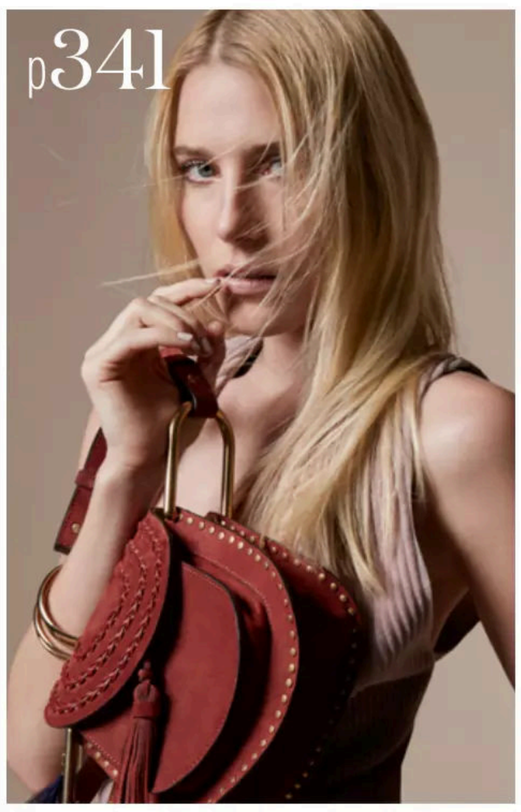

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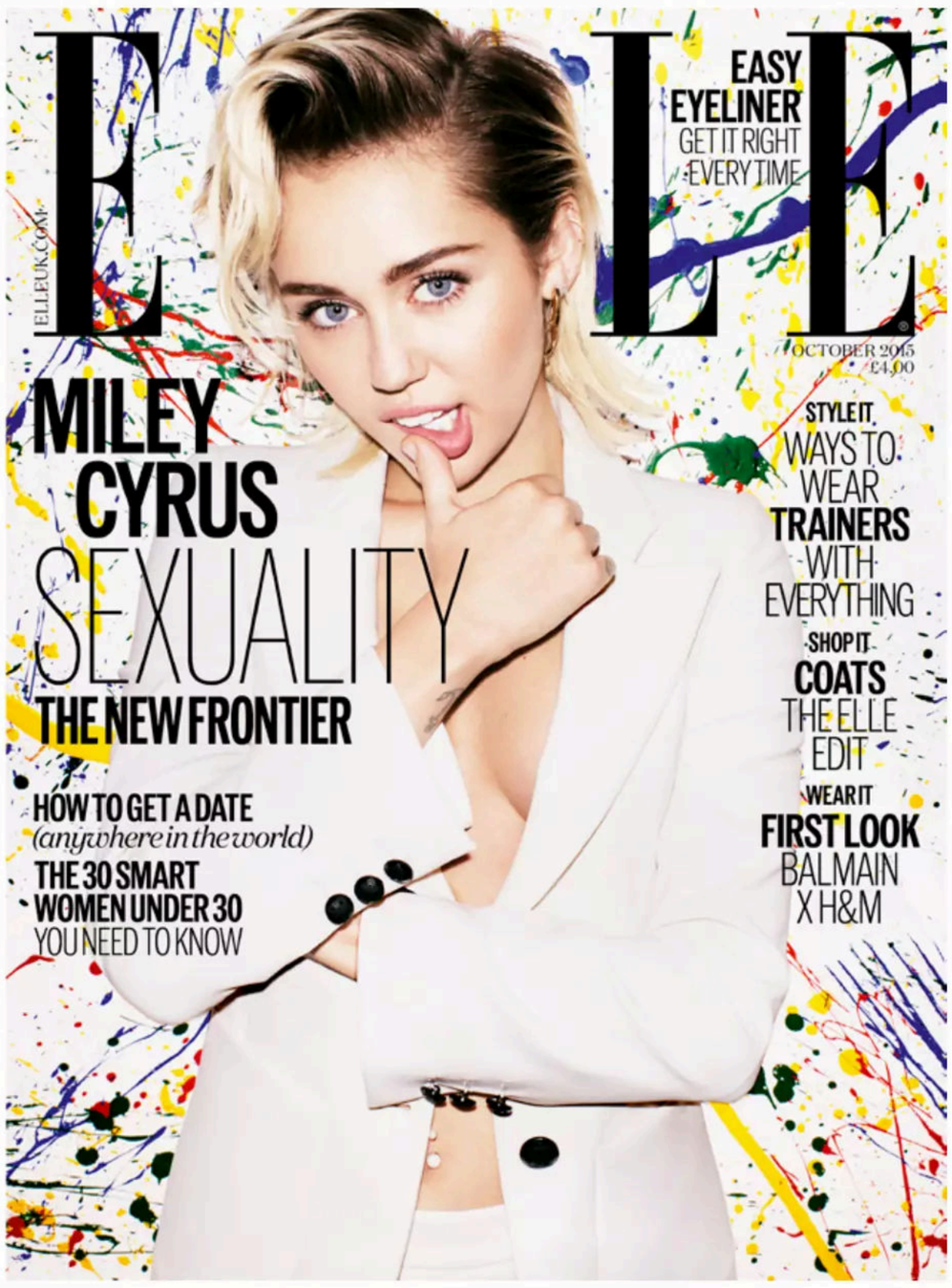

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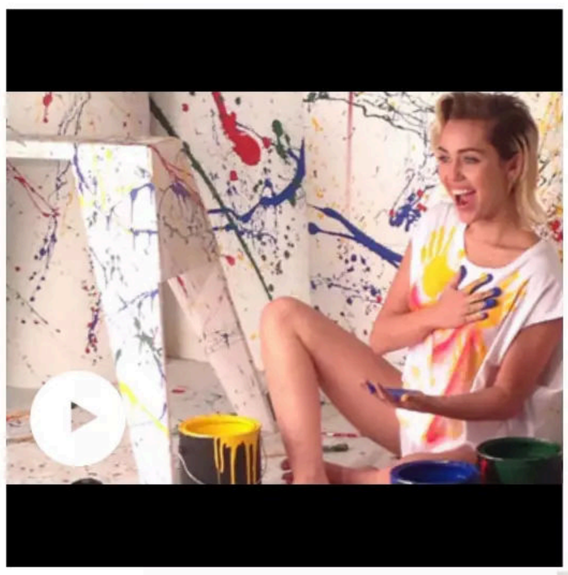

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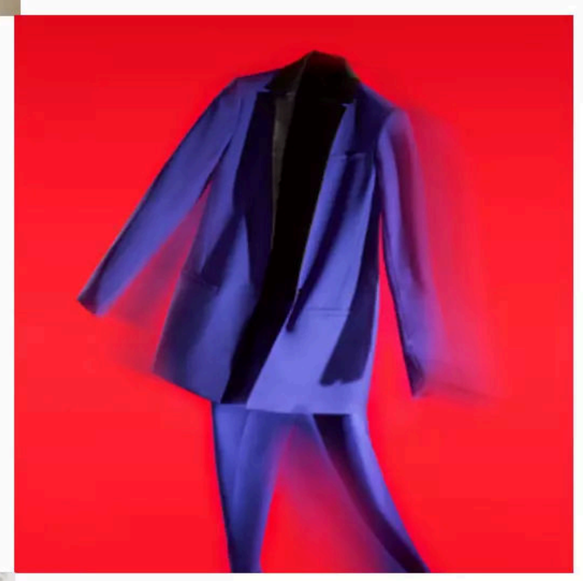

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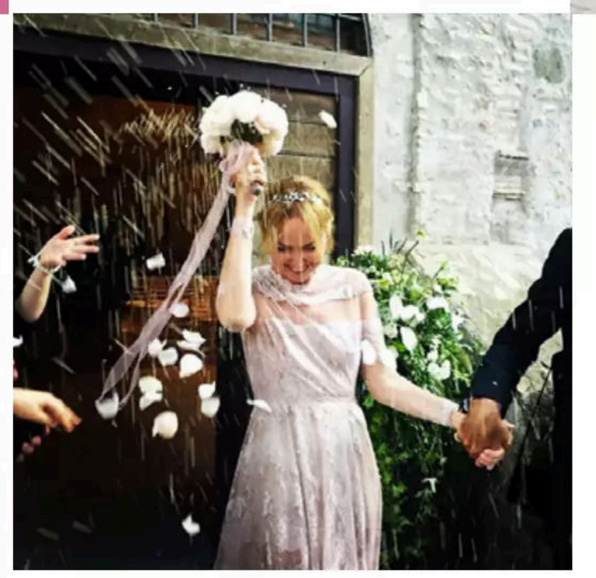

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Lorraine Candy
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Editor-in-Chief's PA/Editorial Assistant
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fashion@elleuk.com

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Head of Editorial Business Management
Debbie Morgan @Deb_ELLE

FEATURES & NEWS
features@elleuk.com

Travel & Lifestyle Director
Susan Ward Davies @ELLETravelEd
Culture Director
Lena de Casparis
@lenadecasparis
Senior Commissioning Editor
Hannah Swerling
@HannahELLEUK

@ELLEBEAUTYTEAM

BEAUTY
Contributing Beauty Correspondant
Natalie Lukaitis @natlukaitis

ART
art@elleuk.com

Art Director
Miette L. Johnson @MietteLJ
Deputy Art Director
Lisa Rahman @lisarahman

PHOTOGRAPHY
photography@elleuk.com

Picture Editor
Lara Ferros
@LaraFerros
Picture Editor: Multimedia
Sunil Makan
@sunileo86

COPY
Chief Sub-Editor/Production Editor
Fern Ross @fern_ross
Acting Deputy Chief Sub-Editor
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Publisher
Jacqui Cave 020 7439 5273
PA to Publisher
Charlotte Rottenburg
charlotte.rottenburg@hearst.co.uk
Associate Publisher
Jayne Ellis 020 7439 5680
Associate Publisher, Fashion & Luxury
Lee Brown 020 7439 5118
Advertising Director
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Regional Office
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LAGARDÈRE GLOBAL ADVERTISING

CEO Claudio Piovesana
claudio.piovesana@
lagardere-active.com

Lagardère Global Advertising
124 rue Danton, 92300
Levallois-Perret, France

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We're at the vanguard of a new movement. One that **challenges everything** we thought we knew about **sex and gender:** Does dating a girl make you a lesbian? Does being born male make you less of a woman? **Is your sexuality fluid?** In 2015 we can ask these kinds of questions, and enjoy the fact that **the answers** are so far from black and white... **they're a riot of colour.**

THE GENDER DEBATE

MILEY CYRUS GETS THE CONVERSATION STARTED ➤

Wool jacket (with brooch), and wool trousers (with braces), both Saint Laurent. Silver and pearl earring, and metal earrings, both Alex Monroe. Gold safety pin earrings, and gold hoop earring, all Miley's own

EXPRESS YOURSELF

To mark our **30th birthday,** we invited **Miley Cyrus,** a true activist for the Instageneration, to discuss her views on **sexuality, gender and love**

Words **Lena de Casparis** Photography **Matt Irwin** Fashion **Alison Edmond**

Miley Cyrus is still covered in paint as she drives me down Sunset Boulevard. It's just past 7pm on a Saturday evening in July. The palms lining the sidewalk are lit up by that famous LA glow, and I'm sitting shotgun in her white Maserati with the windows down. My feet are surrounded by old food wrappers and what looks like a scrunched up onesie. The back seat is scattered with more outfit changes than I packed for my entire trip to California.

Miley, fresh from her paint-splattered ELLE shoot, is playing me a taster of her new album on the car stereo, singing along to the key lines of her single *Baby Talk* like she's on stage at Madison Square Garden. 'Do you think it's funny?' she asks. 'I want to make people laugh.' It is, I tell her, enjoying the track's monologue where she describes exactly how she wants to have sex. Though in truth, my laughter is as much to do with the surreal situation as it is her new lyrics.

As we approach red lights, and come to jolted stops, ›

Left and far right:
Cotton T-shirt,
American Apparel.
Gold earring,
Alex Monroe

people in neighbouring cars clock who's driving and yell her name. Miley seems to barely notice, like it happens every day. She is, after all, the most famous 22-year-old on the planet. I, on the other hand, am not so used to the attention and find myself doing an awkward British wave like some robot version of the Queen. I'm sort of hoping they think I'm her new Stella Maxwell, the Victoria's Secret model Miley was supposedly dating, but more on her later.

Miley was destined for fame. Born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1992, her dad is Billy Ray Cyrus, the country singer famed for karaoke classic *Achy Breaky Heart*, and her mum is film producer and actress Leticia (Tish) Cyrus.

Aged 14, Miley hit the big time on Disney Channel's *Hannah Montana* and became America's favourite teen girl-next-door. It was a shock to her adoring tween fan base when, in 2013, she then dropped the sickly sweet virgin act, lopped off her hair, learned to twerk, and became the most Googled person that year.

Now she has sold over 30 million albums worldwide, has 26 million Instagram followers, 21 million fans on Twitter, and is said to have a net worth of between £75 and £96 million.

When we meet, it has just been announced she is to host this year's VMAs, and she tells me she plans to drop the new album in a Beyoncé-esque surprise the week before ELLE hits the newsstands. So no doubt by the time you read this, the world will be in outrage over something she's done: 'Nothing we're doing [for the VMAs] seems out of control to me, but I thought that the first time, so I'm sure everyone will have a problem.'

To use the kind of bland celebrity platitude she hates, Miley is so Hot Right Now. But for all the millions of followers, VMA furore, and controversial new album, it's something else that sees her on the cover of this 30th anniversary issue of ELLE. It's her role as a gender activist, and her voice as an influential, politically engaged young woman on a mission to make the world more tolerant that we care about.

When ELLE last interviewed Miley, in June 2013, it was unclear what was next for the star. Would she go off the rails like a dynasty of pop stars before her – or play it safe, stick to the script and produce commercially successful bubblegum-pop records. Miley chose neither: she's decided to use her power, and popularity, to do something important.

'I feel like the luckiest woman doing what I do, but being a pop star is kind of the dumbest sh*t of all time, and I was kind of embarrassed that I got paid to shake my ass in a teddy bear costume,' she says. 'I should not be worth the amount I am while people live on the street. Nothing I do will justify that. But I have so much influence as a pop star, it's important I use it.'

And so she started a charity, The Happy Hippie Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to helping homeless and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) youth. A recent project with Instagram involved Miley taking and posting portraits of transgender and gender-expansive people from all walks of life tagged with #InstaPride, to promote tolerance and self-expression by increasing visibility.

One woman Miley met on the project is Precious Davis, 29, who works in diversity recruitment at Columbia University, and transitioned three years ago. 'Miley is using her influence to show the resilience of transgender and gender-variant people, and celebrate that,' she tells me. 'It was inspiring to meet her, she's such a ray of light. Her heart is in the right place and she's authentic. There are lots of pop stars who refuse to be an example to young people, but she has the ear of the youth of America, it's great that she chose to do something positive.'

'[MILEY] HAS THE EAR OF THE YOUTH, IT'S GOOD SHE CHOSE TO DO SOMETHING POSITIVE'

The message of 2015 has been that #LoveWins, culminating in the Supreme Court's June ruling on mar-

riage equality for same-sex couples in the US (as well as Ireland's recent move to legalise gay marriage). Now we begin a new era of sexual acceptance, it seems we have a lot to thank Miley for. 'It was one of my happiest days in a long time,' she says of the Supreme Court ruling. 'When I went to breakfast that day, so many people came up to me to thank me for fighting for them, as if I had anything to do with it.'

Miley pulls up to LA's celebrity haunt Soho House. We head up in the lift, and take a seat on a sofa at the back of the restaurant with a view overlooking the sprawling city. She orders a margarita for herself, some guacamole to share, and I go for a large glass of the pinot grigio she recommends. She greets every staff member at the club politely. 'A guy said to me recently that I treat everyone the same. It was the best compliment ever, far better than him saying I was cute.'

I find myself asking if she comes here often. Oh god, perhaps I really am pretending this is a date.

She joined the members' club a few months back and likes it because the rules mean people can't ask for her picture while she's eating. Her mum gets annoyed when dinner is interrupted.

Tish turned up at the end of our cover shoot. Petite and perfect, she slipped in without a fuss, looked at the shots, and yelled proudly in her sexy Southern drawl, 'This is my favourite shoot you've ever done,' to which Miley replied, 'You say that on every one, Mom!'

Their relationship seemed loving and, well, incredibly normal – Tish tells me she likes Miley's hair at this length more than her crop, just like my mum told me after I'd grown my hair out aged 19.

Earlier that day, Miley had sat in the make-up chair reading aloud an article that appears in *Charisma News*, an extreme Christian magazine, entitled *Miley Cyrus Just Did Something Shameful On Instagram* – a response to her upcoming VMA performance. 'Billy Ray Cyrus, the country music star and father of the misguided youth,' she reads aloud, 'was probably sick to his stomach watching his baby on stage,' taking pauses between each sentence to laugh.

On the face of things, internet haters and religious commentators don't seem to bother her. 'When I hear [this type of] criticism, I brush it off. Often it's hilarious,' she says, clearly disillusioned by the religion she was brought up with.

'My parents are proud of my work. My dad doesn't care what I do on stage – he gets my being controversial. In his day, he would be wearing tank tops and Reeboks to the Grammys when all the other country singers wore cowboy boots. My parents have learned a lot about LGBT issues from me. They're 50 and from the South so I don't expect them to understand it all, but I ask them just to accept it for me.'

The so-called 'shameful' things Miley had been doing are perhaps just the things people use to dismiss her politics: the tongue-wagging and stripping off on social media. But you'd be wrong to judge this woman by her Instagram feed – there is a lot more to her. She seems acutely aware of what she's doing, and how to command attention. 'You get your tits out, and they are all looking, then you can use that space to say something and get them to listen.'

'IF YOU'RE FUNNY, COOL AND CONFIDENT ENOUGH, THAT'S WHAT WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BEAUTIFUL'

What she maybe misses is that her way of getting that attention sometimes hinders her ability to be listened to and taken seriously. But for Miley, she is just being Miley, and doesn't understand why that should impact on whether her message is heard. And perhaps she has a point.

Being liberated and free with her body is inspiring a whole movement. We talk at length about her armpit hair and how it encouraged an army of young women to grow theirs and share it on social media. 'I only got rid of it because I was drunk and found a waxing kit. I miss it.' She goes on to say she ›

won't stand for people airbrushing it out in pictures: it's part of her.

Another picture that got lots of attention was one she'd posted of herself on Instagram three weeks earlier wearing a T-shirt saying 'Gender Is Over', a post that received over 550k likes, 100k more than an average post. I ask her to explain what her genderless world looks like.

'When a baby is born, it seems clear: here's a girl, and here's a boy. But once you're an adult, you can choose who you are. We're born humans,' she says, never breaking eye contact as we talk unless it's to dip a crisp in some guac. 'I am a feminist – there's still inequality to fight – but I don't relate to what people have made men and women into. Like men play sport, and they eat meat, and women sit in a dress painting their nails. I'm more extreme and badass than most guys, but that doesn't make me a boy. And the other night I wore a pink dress because I felt cute. I can bake a cupcake and then go play hockey.'

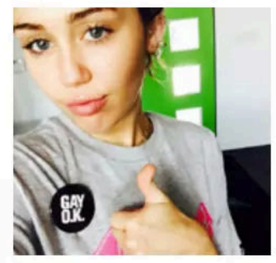
She thinks it's boring that everyone is so obsessed with what's in people's pants. 'Everyone asks, "Does Caitlyn Jenner have a d*ck?" But no one cared before what was in Bruce Jenner's pants,' she says, and goes on to explain her anger that transsexuals have to undergo the operation to be able to legally change their gender on their passports.

As for her own sexuality, she tells me, 'I'm very open about it – I'm pansexual.' In truth, I later have to Google the word to figure out exactly what it means, and find it to be someone who is open to all sexual orientations or gender. But Miley is sure to repeatedly tell me she's not looking for any kind of relationship right now. 'I'm 22, I'm going on dates, but I change my style every two weeks, let alone who I'm with.'

When Miley arrived at the photo studio earlier in the day, she was very hungover from what sounded like a heavy night. She showed everyone on set – and those 26 million Instagram followers – a temporary tattoo of an Australian flag on her bottom, and let us all know that it was put on by the guy she was with the night before. I assume she must have a thing for Aussie guys – she was, after all, engaged to actor and *Hunger Games* star Liam Hemsworth for three years before they split in 2013.

I wonder what happened to her and model Stella Maxwell – just weeks ago, she had shared pictures of them canoodling. 'Stella's awesome, but as soon as you hang out with someone, you get labelled as in a relationship. And I'm like, you can't just assume that everyone I'm sitting at dinner with is a date. It'd be like we're on a date right now.'

'I'M VERY OPEN ABOUT MY SEXUALITY – I AM PANSEXUAL'



I do my best faux-outrage face, and hope she can't tell that's what I've been pretending all night.

'Then you break up and it's everywhere. And it's like, "They've moved on," but actually often it's all good. Me and Liam are still so close and we love each other, and they make it like there is negativity.'

It seems like a very mature attitude to love and relationships – at 30, my own emotional IQ is the equivalent of 'pull my finger' by comparison.

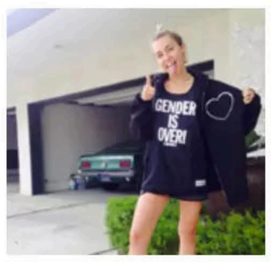
'I feel a lot older. I don't want people to ever think I'm better or smarter than anyone else who is 22, but all my friends are in their 30s and I grew up on a TV show where everyone was an adult. I think that's why I swooped into the relationship with Liam – it was nice to be around someone my age.'

Her confidence is resilient. I wonder, does she have any concerns at all? 'I've had really bad anxiety and depression in my life and a lot of that stemmed from the way I look. My mom was a pageant queen, as was my grandma, so I've been programmed with that. Now, I really try not to give a f*ck. I obviously have hang-ups, but I'm not going to get stuck on it. If you're funny enough and cool enough and confident, that's what will make you feel beautiful.'

Cheers to that. I order another wine, and notice Miley has barely touched her margarita. Maybe it's the hangover, or maybe she's not always quite as wild as she lets on.

I want to know more about the new album. Miley says it was written on the Bangerz tour, during which she felt lonely – particularly after her dog died. As a result, she wants it to be called *Miley Cyrus And Her Dead Pets*.

She recorded it in a studio in her backyard with the help of Wayne Coyne from The Flaming Lips. The sound is less pop than *Wrecking Ball* or *We Can't Stop*, instead rougher and braver. 'Yes, one of the songs talks about f*cking me and smoking pot, but they say a lot more,' she says. 'It's different to [Taylor Swift's] *Shake It Off*. I only use Taylor as an example as she's the most famous person right now, but if you make a song like that, then you're neutral, ›



@MILEYCYRUS

Photography: Instagram.com/mileycyrus

Wool shirt, Anthony Vaccarello. Cotton pants, Tezenis. Rose gold earring, Alex Monroe

and everyone can like it. But with this work, I think [only] some people will like it. The Parent Television Council – they're not going to love it. But then it's not for them. I'm 22, I live in LA, all my friends live in LA, and this is how we think.'

She reveals that it's her plan to give the album away for free. 'So if you want it, you download it, and if you don't like it, you can trash it. It takes a lot of stress and competition off it.' Then she adds, 'It might get to number one, but I didn't want to think if it's not, then I failed.' I suspect she's nervous about how it will be received, but with true Miley bravado, she's not letting on. I ask, if it all goes wrong with the music, would she ever consider a career in politics? From what I've heard today, I hope she'll say yes – it would certainly shake up Washington.

'No, I couldn't be Obama. There are too many idiots in politics, and I have a short fuse. Plus, I would need to be older and smarter. I'd need to read the papers every day. But the trouble with politics is that it's all old men. I don't want a man to do anything for me because they're so disorganised. You need a woman in there taking care of sh*t,' she says with a smile, and it's clear she's rooting for Hillary Clinton. 'I'm excited that it's soon to change. If we can go from a black president to a female one, we're finally living up to being the land of freedom. To have a female president will be so powerful and inspire women.'

With that, two of Miley's friends – music video director Diane Martel (the woman behind Robin Thicke's controversial *Blurred Lines*) and a young male friend – arrive and join our table. We all sit around discussing Miley's music. I have yet another glass of pinot, the star stays sober.

After a short while, Miley politely makes her excuses, pays for our drinks, saying she needs to go feed her pig (called Pig) – although I suspect it's the Australian from last night she's keen to get back to.

If this really had been a date, I'd have been utterly wooed and wondering how soon it would be acceptable to send a text. On the surface, Miley may seem a muddle of contradictions – a Maserati driver helping the homeless, a feminist gyrating on stage in the buff – but she's absolutely, refreshingly confident that it's OK to occupy a grey area.

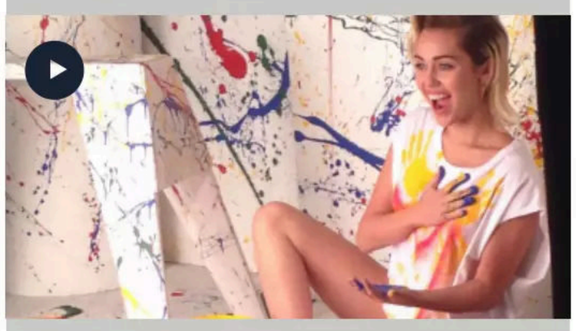
She holds a giant foam middle finger up to labels and refuses to be limited by other people's ideas of what it means to be bisexual, a feminist, an activist or even a party girl. She says, 'I want people to live their lives, have all the things they love, but they just have to do *something* that isn't self-serving.' Miley is leading by example and the world might just be a better place if we all followed suit.

Miley Cyrus And Her Dead Pets is out now

MILEY IN MINUTES

Favourite app
Brief Me. It gives me the top five news things going on.
Best teacher
Mrs DeVere, my second grade teacher – she always believed in me and put me in plays.
Life motto
Be happy, love what you do, f*ck everything else – without hurting anyone.
Midnight last night
Drunk, tie-dying T-shirts.
Dream superpower
Reading minds, as I want to detect lies to see if people are bullsh*tting.
Always in the fridge
Avocados and almond milk.
Most overused words
Badass and dude.
Favourite exercise
Ashtanga yoga. I love it. If anything was ever my religion, that'd be it.
Best advice
Take care of people in the world.
Favourite film
Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind or *The Truman Show* – I love Jim Carrey.
Hidden talent
I love making art and doing crafts. I shot and made my new album cover myself.
Soundtrack to life
A Johnny Cash record or The Flaming Lips – I hope my album sounds as if they had a baby.
Advice for the young
Care most about what you think and know that there's so much more to being beautiful than the physical.

EXCLUSIVE VIDEO



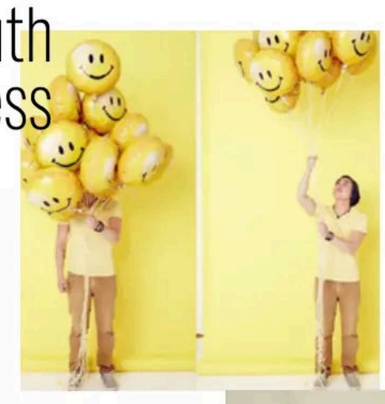
ELLE **WATCH IT**
Get behind the scenes with our exclusive Miley video

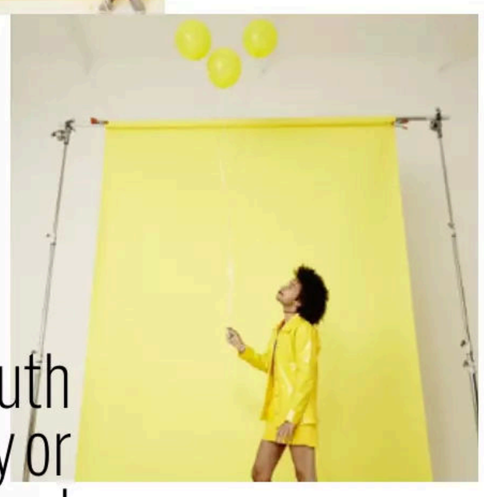
Cotton shirt, H&M. For shopping details, see Address Book. Hair: Andy LeCompte for Wella Professionals at The Wall Group. Make-up: Sabrina Bedrani at Tracey Mattingly using Dior. Manicure: Stephanie Stone at Nailing Hollywood using Chanel. Set design: Lauren Machen at Redeye Reps. On-set production: Frank Roller at glamPR.com. Film: Duy Nguyen at Mondial Creative. With thanks to: Milk Studios and the Hotel Palomar, Beverly Hills

40% of homeless youth identify as LGBT, and family rejection is the most common reason LGBT youth experience homelessness

‘THIS IS THE THING I’M MOST PROUD OF’

MILEY CYRUS





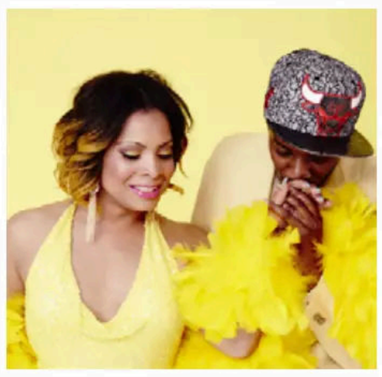
25% of homeless youth have been physically or sexually abused

THE HAPPY HIPPIE FOUNDATION

On 5 May 2015, Miley Cyrus launched The Happy Hippie Foundation to rally young people to fight injustices facing homeless youth, LGBT youth and other vulnerable people. One of its projects is #InstaPride, a collaboration between Miley and Instagram featuring gender-expansive individuals. Here are the facts...

1 in 3 transgender people have been turned away from homeless shelters

‘We are living in the trans-moment of history when people can claim their trans-ness. This is the great civil rights movement of 2015.’
Precious Davis, 29, with fiancé Myles, 33, both Chicago

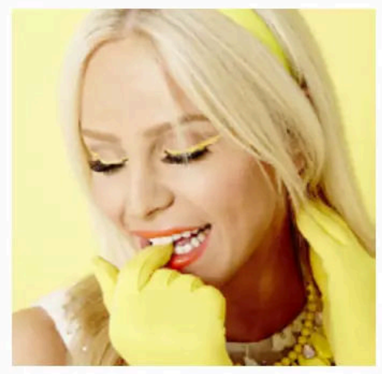


1.6 million youth in the US are homeless each year

100% of sales from Miley’s special edition Mac Viva Glam lipstick and lipgloss go towards helping people living with or affected by HIV/Aids

‘To me, support and acceptance mean respecting me and having my back when I’m forced to deal with the bigoted assh*les of the world.’
Nina (right), 23, from Mumbai, India, who co-founded the non-profit organisation Trans Lifeline with her wife Greta (left), 46

‘I’m hopeful that more transgender stories will come out and people will see that what is different is beautiful, and it’s nothing they should be scared or apprehensive about.’
Gigi, 19, Montreal



‘The biggest misunderstanding is no doubt the difference between sexual orientation and gender.’
AJ, 18, Townsend, Massachusetts

For more information go to happyhippies.org

Images: Courtesy of happyhippies.org.

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